

Washington, DC -- With authorization for the Hudson River Valley Heritage Area set to expire at the end of September, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today secured the approval of the House Appropriations Committee to reauthorize funding for the program for another two years. Hinchey, who authored the legislation to establish the Heritage Area in 1996, used his position on the House Appropriations Committee and worked in bipartisan fashion with Congressman Steve LaTourette (R-OH) to obtain the extension for the Hudson River Valley Heritage Area and 11 others across the country. The authorization was included as part of the Interior Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2013.

"This is a big victory for the Hudson River Valley. Securing approval of this extension for the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area means that our region will continue to have the full federal support it has and deserves to showcase its remarkable natural beauty, historic legacy, and cultural richness on a national level," Hinchey said. "The Heritage Area designation has drawn greater, positive attention on the Hudson Valley, paid for the preservation and restoration of historic sites, and helped draw tourists to the area, which in turn have helped local small businesses. I was pleased to create this program 16 years ago and I am very happy to be able to secure this extension. I also thank Senator Gillibrand for the continuing work she is doing in the Senate to help maintain this program for many years to come."

"For the past 16 years, the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area has showcased the remarkable natural beauty, historic legacy, and cultural richness of our region," Hinchey said. "It is absolutely critical that we maintain this important federal designation that has drawn positive attention to our region, preserved significant sites, and helped increase tourism, which in turn has helped the local economy. Protecting and promoting the Hudson River Valley for this and future generations of New Yorkers and all Americans has been a primary focus of my work in public service for a long time and I am working to ensure this Heritage Area continues to exist and grow for many years to come."

Now that the House Appropriations Committee has approved the Interior Appropriations bill, the measure moves to the full House, which is expected to give its approval after the Fourth of July holiday. Congress must act before the end of September in order for the Hudson River Valley Heritage Area to continue. Without the authorization, the Heritage Area would no longer be able to receive federal funding to help preserve and promote historical, cultural, recreational, and natural sites in the region.

Immediately upon arriving in Congress in 1993, Hinchey began to work on federal legislation to create the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area. In 1996, the congressman secured passage of that legislation, which was the first federal action formally recognizing the fundamentally significant role the people of the Hudson Valley played in the early development of America and its institutions. The purpose of this federal designation was to "recognize, preserve, protect, and interpret the nationally significant cultural and natural resources of the Hudson River Valley for the benefit of the nation."

Before coming to Congress, Hinchey used his position as a member of the New York State Assembly to author state legislation that created the Hudson River Valley Greenway with the goal of establishing an innovative program that would empower communities throughout the Hudson Valley to develop and implement plans that would improve their economic circumstances and enhance the quality of life for residents. The program, which has been immensely popular and successful, has utilized a "bottom up" approach to regional planning that combines local participation in planning with state and federal dollars in order to achieve the initiative's goals of protecting the incredible natural, historical, cultural, and recreational resources of the Hudson Valley.

The Greenway, which Hinchey established, was already well-organized and effective by the time he secured congressional approval of the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area. At that point, the Greenway was designated as the local manager of the Heritage Area program. The establishment of the new federal program opened up opportunities for federal funding of Greenway initiatives. Under Hinchey's guidance, Congress has directed millions of dollars to the Heritage Area program, which directly complemented and augmented ongoing state Greenway initiatives.

Hinchey plans to work with U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) to ensure a Heritage Area extension is passed into law. Gillibrand has introduced a separate measure in the Senate to extend the Heritage Area, which received a hearing this week in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Hinchey, who grew up along the banks of the Hudson River in both New York City and Saugerties, is also the author of the Hudson River Valley Special Resource Study Act, which would authorize the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct a study on whether the Hudson River Valley should become a unit of the National Park system. Gillibrand is the Senate sponsor of that bill. In order for the Hudson River Valley to become part of the National Park System, a congressionally-authorized NPS study must be conducted. Hinchey's legislation would authorize such a study from Fort Edward in Washington County down through Westchester County. If the NPS's study finds that the Hudson River Valley would be a good fit as part of the National Park System then subsequent legislation would be needed to make that designation.

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